

The CFDA Bracket Match (Updated February 9th, 2020)

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CFDA Bracket Matches are becoming increasingly popular in CFDA. We have learned some valuable lessons, it's time to pass onto our clubs and membership what we have learned. This article is based upon an original article that appeared in the 2015 Spring Gunslinger's Gazette, plus and update from late 2016. This updated article will be posted on our website at www.cowboyfastdraw.com, Rules Section, scroll down to "Helpful Tips to Putting On a Successful Match" and see Bracket Match Information. The original article gave a deep explanation of the history of Fast Draw dating back to the 1950's, and why CFDA Bracket Matches are the missing link we have found that will help CFDA grow in the future, without repeating past mistakes.

Why is the CFDA Bracket Match so important to our sport?

According to a number of our clubs, among their greatest challenges is membership retention. This is nothing new and dates back over 60 years to the original sport of Fast Draw. We firmly believe, that developing substance in our formats so that shooters of all abilities can still find plenty to enjoy within our sport is the answer, and that incorporating Bracket Matches into both local and national match formats is the solution.

The best will always be the best, because they work hard to develop their skills. There is a difference between being fast, and being the best who are known as Top Guns. CFDA Top Guns are artists and Cowboy Fast Draw is their art-form. We enjoy watching them and have honored them when they've earned their place in our CFDA Hall of Champions. Some, have become the legends of our game, by winning multiple championship titles in a manner that earns the respect of their fellow competitors. They often go on to become great Ambassadors of CFDA.

We are also blessed with our most valuable asset, our club, contest, and national program leaders. These are the folks that build the clubs and host matches, which are the very foundation that CFDA is built upon. They serve as Club Officers, U.S. Marshals, Scorekeepers, Range Masters, Announcers, Match Directors, Regulators, and Leaders of our National Programs, like the CFDA Shoot for the Stars, the CFDA Regulator Posse, the CFDA Scoring Program Beta Team, etc.. They often earn a place of well-deserved honor in our CFDA Hall of Recognition, winning our Top Hand Awards. They also become some of CFDA's greatest Ambassadors.

We also have a wonderful general membership who donate the time that they can and support to sport when their job and budget allows. Most of these folks, and we talk to them every day from our CFDA office, tell us that they have demanding jobs, are raising families, going to school, or are on a tight budget. Many dream of the day when they will have the time and money to live the CFDA Lifestyle. Yes, there is a CFDA Lifestyle, but that is the subject of a whole other article that should be written.

The common thread of all of our groups above is that we all play the game, for the sake of the game. There is no better definition than, "It's about handshakes, camaraderie, a man's word, morality and friendship, fair play and honest competition. Our credo is 'The Cowboy Way' in action and deed; it requires no further explanation."

Whether there is money to shoot for or not is irrelevant. We cannot all be "Top Guns", because most of us have other responsibilities or limitations in life and cannot practice or travel to contests as much as we would like to. But, we can ALL play the game for the sake of the game, and do the best we can on any given day. This is made possible due to the targets and distances we have chosen that provide a balance of speed and accuracy, anything can happen in Cowboy Fast Draw on any given day, this is the reason we show up and shoot the matches.

In consideration of the above paragraphs, our goal is to find the right combination of formats that provides substance for all that play our game. The nature of our game is fair competition. We don't believe in devaluing accomplishment by giving everyone an award just for showing up. However, we have developed and continue to develop what I am convinced is the "**salvation of the future of our sport.**" CFDA Bracket Match Formats provide an opportunity to win at every level, not a guarantee, just an opportunity, and that resonates with most of our members.

Suggestions For Running CFDA Bracket Club Matches

While a number of clubs and match hosts have learned to include CFDA Bracket Matches into their format, many have not. Here is what we have learned so far.

If your club is still running a pure 3 or 4-X Elimination Format Club Matches, you're probably sending members home early feeling a little empty, especially newer or moderately skilled shooters. Being eliminated from a local one-day match, in 3 or 4 rounds, adds to the challenge of retaining that member and does not build and develop a club's membership.

The Great Basin Gun Hawks, are probably the most experimented upon club in CFDA, since they shoot at our CFDA Home Range, a.k.a. The Bat Barn. After experimenting with various formats over the past two years, we have learned that our average attendance has increased, because we have found a fulfilling format that everyone enjoys. We keep our shooters shooting all day long and many stay for the finals even if they didn't make the final cut. Here is our most popular and current format for our 3rd Saturday of the Month Club Matches.

Recommended Format for Inclusive CFDA (1 Day) Club Shoots

Preliminary Early Rounds (No X Out Format)(9 a.m. - Noon)

Start shooting preliminary rounds at 9:00 a.m. and shoot as many No-X-Out Format rounds as you can until the noon lunch break. We are now using the Nevada 8 format (See 9th Edition Rulebook), this keeps the rounds moving quickly. We run all shooters together in the early preliminary rounds, Men, Ladies and Youth all compete against each other. We have one 6-Lane range. Last month's match had 24 shooters, we got through 8 rounds by the lunch break!

Lunch Break & Bracket Match Setup (Noon to 12:30 p.m.)

During the Lunch Break, the scorekeepers first generate a Match Standings Report and conduct an "X-Count" roll call. After verifying the X-Count, we then determine and announce the Top 7 Men, Top 5 Ladies, and Top 5 Youth, based upon the overall standings in the morning preliminary rounds. This is important, since we run a Championship Shootoff Format at end of the day, which determines our Overall Men's, Ladies and Youth Champions. Ties for X Counts are broken by the fastest time in the last preliminary round. We announce the last round before it is shot, so that everyone knows to try to put out their best shot, since last round tie-breaker shots can determine making the final shootoff or not.

We then run a **Bracket Report**, that is available in the CFDA Scoring Program under Reports, divide the shooters into the 3 brackets we run at our local matches. We divide the bracket report evenly, like grading on a curve, so in this match there were 8 shooters in each bracket. In matches where this is an odd number of shooters. We tend to put the greater number of shooters in the Master Gunfighters Bracket, since the more experienced shooters tend to be a little more efficient in loading and unloading.

Bracket Match (12:30 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.)

We then run a 2-X, Nevada 8 Format in an alternating fashion for all 3 brackets. It moves pretty quickly into the 2nd round, where shooters begin to be eliminated. We are generally done with the bracket match in well under two hours. We award Prize Certificates to the Top 3 Shooters in each Bracket, at the Awards Ceremony at the end of the day.

Championship Shoot-off Finals (2:45 p.m. - 3:45 p.m.) (Awards to Follow)

We simply run the standard CFDA Championship Elimination Shoot-off Format that are used in almost all CFDA Titled Championships. We run a straight 3 out 5 Format in the shootoffs for Final Placing.

Results of Our Club Bracket Match Format

- Provides a lot of shooting for everyone.
- No one goes home after being eliminated after a few rounds.
- All shooters get a taste of competing with all levels of shooters in the morning rounds.
- All shooters get an opportunity to win at every level as they compete against shooters in their own general time range during the Bracket Matches.
- No complaining about what shooters are in what bracket since they are assigned due to actual data recorded during the preliminary rounds earlier that very day.
- The Championship Shoot-off Format defines the clear overall winners for the day. Plus, it prepares our members with experience that comes in handy for major championship matches.

Blast for Cash at Fastest Gun Alive

We continue to have great success and a very positive response to the Blast for Cash that is shot on Sunday morning during the Fastest Gun Alive - World Championship. We may add a 5th Bracket this year if we have over 250 pre-registered shooters, if so, there will be Five - 6 Lane Ranges in use that morning. Please refer to the original article on our website for a complete description of the format we use at FGA.

1.250 Second Maximum Time Limit - How it Applies to Bracket Matches

Please Refer to CFDA Gunslinger's Rules & Handbook (10th Edition, Page. 26). While this rule applies to all CFDA Titled Championships, CFDA Clubs are also encouraged to use this rule as well, as long as they provide exemptions for beginning shooters who are just starting out until they can develop enough proficiency to record times consistently under 1 second.

Since CFDA Bracket Matches are based upon actual recorded times, which transcends genders and ages, it is common to mix Men, Ladies, and Youth Division shooters in this inclusive format. This is done even at the highest example which is the FGA each year. For Level 2 and 3 Youth Division Shooters, it plainly stated within our rules that the 1.250 Time Limit is not imposed "at any level", which includes Bracket Matches. For Level 4 Youth, who compete in Adult Main Match Divisions, it does apply, just as it does when competing in Adult Main Match Divisions.

Bracket Matches at CFDA Titled Championships

Bracket Matches are becoming more popular at many of our State & Territorial Championships. But, it takes **current** data to properly set up a Bracket Match. Therefore, it is not the proper concept to attempt a Bracket Match the day before the Main Match. You should instead either have a Category Shoot or just a Warm-up Jackpot Shoot.

Reason: To arbitrarily attempt to assign or allow shooters to cherry pick a "bracket", means that it transitions into a predetermined "classified" contest. This will soon turn into "class warfare" and politics.

We are seeing a lot of Bracket Matches conducted on the 2nd morning of a 2-Day Main Match, which takes the place of a Second Chance Shoot. It's absolutely fine to choose one of a few ways to do this.

1. If your match is going to have a Championship Shootoff Finals, depending on the size of your match, you can complete the Regular Rounds on the 1st day, and then let everyone in the Bracket Shoot first thing Sunday morning. Then, hold your Finals after that. Do NOT try to also run a Second Chance Match, your event will run late, which disappoints your shooters who often need to head home.
2. If you do not have enough Ranges to complete your entire match on Saturday, then complete the Regular Rounds first thing, and then run your Bracket Match, followed by the Finals.
3. Same as #2, except start with the Bracket Match, then complete the Regular Rounds, then the Shootoffs.
4. In Last Man Standing Championship Formats, just hold an all conclusive Bracket Match first thing Sunday morning, and then run the Main Match to its conclusion. The Bracket Match is both a Second Chance for those who have been eliminated and a great second day warm-up for those who are still in the running for the championship.

The key thing to remember is that Bracket Matches provide a competitive opportunity for shooters of all abilities.

How Many Brackets Should You Have?

That depends on both the size of your match and how many Ranges you have provided. If you have only two Ranges, you might have 4 Brackets and assign two Brackets per range. If you have three ranges, you may only want to have 3 Brackets. It is important to keep your Brackets balanced in shooters assigned per range, so that your Brackets will all finish about the same time.